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**Saying “thanks”:
Avoid pitfalls
when showing
appreciation**

Getting board members involved in thanking donors is a great way to introduce them to fundraising. But before putting someone in charge of thank-you notes, make sure they’re aware of the following appreciation pitfalls:

- Waiting too long. Your thank you should get out the door within 48 hours. Timely follow-up makes a difference. If more time passes, they’ll feel the gift wasn’t well-received.
- Misspelling donor’s names. There’s no faster way to make donors feel insignificant than misspelling their names. Double-check the spelling before putting it in ink.
- Sending it to “Friend.” When possible, personalize the salutation. Most people go by their first name (unless you know otherwise). It’s awkward to send a note to “Dear Ms. R. Beatrice” when the donor goes by “Bitty.”

• Not being specific. Put personalized notes in the card. For example, if they earmarked the gift for a particular purpose, note in the thank-you that you’ll spend it appropriately. The customization shows you listened to them.

For more ideas, go to: Tinyurl.com/ThankingDonorsNBR
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NEWS FOR NONPROFITS

Boards making an impact

**Powerful storytelling technique
inspires donors**

I’ve learned that telling stories is a great way to inspire board members and donors. And how you tell the story makes a difference.

I like to paint a picture of how life will look without the organization – and compare it to how it could look with it. That always has a big impact on donors.

Imagine the possibilities

My favorite nonprofit story goes like this: Imagine a girl who lives in a dangerous neighborhood. She wants to participate in the after-school program, but can’t because it’s unsafe for her to walk home at 6 p.m. and her parents work until 8 p.m. Her friends have the same problem.

Now imagine that girl goes to her mentors from our nonprofit. They connect her to the county supervisor in her district. She asks for a meeting with the supervisor and they find a solution.

As a result, she and her fellow students stay after school and have a safe way home. This is our work.

– Nathan Slovin, Director of Customer Excellence Programs at Advanced Solutions International, Inc., Washington, DC

**How we helped board members
take the job seriously**

In the past, our board meetings were largely social affairs. We always had food and board members wouldn’t prepare ahead of time.

As a result, they’d come in and we’d spend half the time telling them what was going on before we could get down to business. It was clear they didn’t feel engaged in the mission. And many people stopped coming.

Set new expectations

So we got the board together and laid out new expectations. We decided to have quarterly meetings without food or social time. And people were expected to prepare ahead of time.

Setting the expectations and following through has changed the tone of the meetings. Board members want to feel useful – and now they see how they can make a difference.

Change doesn’t happen overnight – and we’re still making progress in getting the whole board engaged. But we’re heading in the right direction.

– Elizabeth Gilmer, Director of External Affairs, East Georgia College, Swainsboro, GA

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**Step-by-step pledges eased
donors into larger gifts**

We’d always relied heavily on grants. But because there’s less money available, we needed to boost donations. That was a major challenge because most people weren’t used to donating to our organization.

To ease them into it, we started a step-by-step endowment program. People can pledge a certain amount instead of paying all at once. It helps to ease them into making larger gifts.

Started internally

We started by marketing the program to current donors. It really worked – they’ve made much bigger commitments. Part of the reason is simply because we were willing to ask.

Our board members have participated as well. Two made significant endowment commitments. We still have a long way to go, but the approach is off to a good start.

– Fred Thursfield, President, Altoona Regional Health System Foundation, Altoona, PA

**What inspires people to give?
Famous fundraisers offer key insights**

Even the most dedicated board members need a little inspiration when faced with the task of fundraising.

That’s true for rich and famous philanthropists, too, according to a new collection of interviews for Give Smart, which strives to help philanthropists make good decisions on giving.

In the video interviews, famous donors such as Michael J. Fox share inspirational stories about their commitment to a cause.

Here are a few of their stories and the lessons you can learn from them:

Seeing is believing

Richard Atlas, a founding member of the board for The California Endowment, shares the emotions he felt after his board’s director took him to see a tenement housing project in Los Angeles.

“Now I realize I’m not asking for anything. I’m saying, ‘Do you want to invest in this project and join us in the victory of finding an answer?’ It’s amazing how receptive people are to that message.”

– Michael J. Fox

Atlas was a new grandfather when he made the visit, so he was particularly moved by seeing young children playing in dirty hallways and sleeping in closets.

“I saw things I’d read about or seen in movies, but never seen in real life. It smelled and it was ugly,” Atlas says.

“I couldn’t believe people in our community lived like this. That had the hugest impact on me.”

The visit made him even more committed to the cause.

The takeaway: Site visits are worth the time and trouble, even for those who are already supporters.

Asking for donations

Michael J. Fox, who has become the celebrity face of Parkinson’s research, shares his personal struggle with asking for donations, and how he changed his way of thinking.

“My instinct always would have been not to ask for anything,” Fox says. But after successfully raising money, he saw it differently.

“Now I realize I’m not asking for anything. I’m saying, ‘Do you want to invest in this project and join us in the victory of finding an answer?’ It’s amazing how receptive people are to that message.”

The takeaway: Remember giving is an opportunity for the donor – not a favor.

What a picture can do

Ray Chambers, co-founder of Malaria No More, recalls how he chose which cause to support. It all started with a picture.

Fellow philanthropist Jeffrey Sachs showed him a photo of children sleeping in an African village.

They looked peaceful. But Sachs told him, “You don’t understand. They’re not sleeping – they’re in malaria comas and many of them have probably already died.”

“I’ll never get that image out of my mind’s eye,” Chambers says. He went on to start his new foundation.

The takeaway: It’s still important to share numbers and statistics. But remember images and stories are what move people to action.

Two sides of the charitable deductions debate

Although the recent “Fiscal Cliff” legislation retained the charitable deduction, the January 2013 issue of GuideStar shared two sides of the debate:

“Don’t Push Charities Over the Fiscal Cliff,” reprinted from the *Independent Sector*, Dec. 11, 2012, featured this letter:

Dear Mr. President and Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned, write to express our concern that ongoing discussions in Washington to avoid the so-called “fiscal cliff” may ultimately produce policies that disproportionately impact our most vulnerable communities. We lead nonprofit organizations whose tens of millions of employees and volunteers are working to improve lives in every community across America ...

And the *Nonprofit Quarterly* published this editorial, titled:

“In Defense of Taxes – Even If They Might Cut into Charitable Giving”:

“In recent weeks, nonprofit organizations mobilized against the threat that Congress would limit tax deductions for charitable gifts. Because charitable deductions provide an incentive for giving, many nonprofit leaders fear that scaling them back will make it harder to raise money. Following the ‘fiscal cliff’ negotiations, the charitable deduction remains more or less intact—at least for now.

“As we consider the broader implications of tax reform and government spending and gear up for legislative fights to come, I am concerned that many of my nonprofit colleagues are overreacting or – even worse – responding to the wrong threat ...”

For more on the debate, go to www.guidestar.org.